The Declaration emphasizes the imoprtance of cooperation in energy, transportation and communication links in promoting accelerated and balanced economic growth issues. The Declaration refers to, *inter alia,* cooperation on economic and financial matters, tourism, science & technology, health, culture, environment, and information and communication technology. The Declaration also underscores the importance of poverty alleviation and the need for investment in human resources and skills development.

Hailing the signature of SAARC Social Charter, the Declaration notes the far-reaching impact it could have in areas such as poverty alleviation, population stabilization, empowerment of women, youth mobilization, human resource development, promotion of health and nutrition and protection of children. The need to focus attention on the issue of HIV/ AIDS through a SAARC Awareness Year for TB/HIV AIDS is also incorporated in the Declaration.

Apart from this, the Declaration also condemns terrorist violence and stresses that the signing of the Additional Protocol on terrorism is a further manifestation of the determination of SAARC Countries to eliminate ail forms and manifestations of terrorism from South Asia.

In accordance with Article X of the SAARC Charter, bilateral issues excluded from the deliberations at SAARC meetings. However, bilateral issues relating to India and Pakistan were discussed on the ses of the meeting by the respective sides.

SAARC Summit in Islamabad

2452. SHRI DARA SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any meeting of the SAARC Council of Ministers was held in July, 2004 at Islamabad;

(b) what are the details of Agenda/issues raised at 25th Session of SAARC Foreign Ministers, particularly by India's Foreign Minister; and

(c) what was the outcome of discussions held in Pakistan and the details of the future agenda drawn up by Council of Minister of next SAARC meeting?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) Yes. The 25th session of Council of Ministers of SAARC was held in Islamabad on July 20-21, 2004.

(b) The agenda covered issues related to Poverty Alleviation, establishment of a free trade area in SAARC (SAFTA), cooperation in matters relating to terrorism, energy, biotechnology, environment and communications. Discussions were also held on the SAARC Poverty Alleviation Fund, towards which India had agreed at the Twelfth Summit in January 2004 to contribute US$ 100 millions to be deployed for projects in SAARC countries outside India. India offered additionally to finance feasibility studies for undertaking projects under the Fund. Discussions were also held on terrorism. All SAARC member countries emphasized the need to put an end to the scourge of terrorism and welcomed the offer of Bangladesh to host a Ministerial Meeting on cooperation among SAARC countries on combating terrorism and transnational crimes. Our External Affairs Minister made the following important proposals for regional cooperation:

(i) Setting up of SAARC Parliamentary Forum to deliberate on issues pertaining to regional cooperation endeavours under SAARC, and offered to host the next meeting of the Forum.

(ii) Establishment of a SAARC High Economic Council formed with the Finance and Commerce Ministers of the SAARC Member Countries to promote ideas and initiatives related to regional economic integration in economic, trade, financial and monetary areas.

(iii) Setting up of a SAARC Infrastructure Fund to fund major infrastructure projects in the region.

(iv) Setting up of National Committees in members countries mandated to monitor and devise programmes to implement the goals of the SAARC Social Charter, as well as consult with each other to promote collaborative Poverty Alleviation Projects, including under the SAARC Poverty Alleviation Fund.

(v) As part of the SAARC Awareness Year for TB and HIV/AIDS, the Council decided to give a SAARC Youth Award for

Dedicated Community Services in the field of TB and/or HIV/ AIDS. India offered to host a meeting this year of experts and community workers, train paramedics from the SAARC countries, and also offered to send medical vans and mobile awareness units to each of the SAARC countries.

The above proposals were endorsed by other SAARC countries.

(c) The meeting strengthened regional cooperation within the SAARC framework. The next SAARC meeting at Dhaka in January, 2005 will monitor the implementation of the decisions arrived at in the Summit of January, 2004 and the 25th Council of Ministers Meeting in July, 2004.

Israeli Trade Consulate in Mumbai

2453. SHRI LALIT SURI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Israel has decided to open a Trade Consulate in Mumbai;

(b) if so, by when, the Consulate is expected to start functioning;

(c) whether India has also decided to open a Trade Consulate in Israel; and

(d) if so, the name of the place and by when the same would start functioning?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) No.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) No.

(d) Does not arise.

Arrest of fishermen in neighbouring countries

2454. SHRI R. KAMARAJ: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of fishermen arrested by our neighbouring countries till now;

(b) what remedial actions, like providing compensation to poor fishermen who are in deep grief due to loss of their boats, have been taken by Government to save the families of poor fishermen; and